Archæological Survey of Western India. No. 12.

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# AN ACCOUNT

OF THE

# CAVES AT NADSUR AND KARSAMBLA,

BY

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# THE NADSUR CAVES.

In Messrs. Fergusson and Burgess' *Cave Temples of India*, and the two later volumes by Dr. Burgess on the cave temples of Elura, &c., a complete account was given of every group of caves of any interest, hitherto discovered on this side of India; and, when these works were published, it was considered doubtful whether any more caves, save isolated and insignificant cells, were still unexplored. The recent discovery of two more interesting groups, within fifty miles of Bombay, situated in the Western Gháts, shows how still unknown to the outside world are the gloomy glens and wild ravines of this rugged mountain range.

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On the 10th of December last (1889) the Rev. J. Abbott, of the Maráthi Mission at Bombay, while on a tour in the Pant Sachiv of Bhor's Konkan districts, was told of certain caves near Nenávli, and he at once visited them. They turned out to be very old Buddhist excavations, hitherto unknown, and, probably, never previously entered by any European. While at these he was told of others, near the village of Nádsur, some five or six miles further north, and in January following, when again in that district, he visited these also. He was kind enough to write and acquaint me of their discovery, and, as his descriptions of them led me to consider them interesting and worth a visit, I determined to wind up my season's tour with an investigation of them instead of continuing my march into Káthiáwád. We consequently left Viramgám after finishing work there, and arrived at Nádsur on the 16th April 1890.

Nádsur, near which the larger group of caves is situated, is a village in the Pant of Bhor's territory five miles east of Páli, the head-quarter village of this district, and 10 miles east of Nágothna, a well-known town on the river Amba, and the terminus of the Harbour Ferry Boat line. The road from Nágothna follows, for two miles, the high road leading south from here, thence it is the roughest possible cart track over rocks, and through the dry bed of the Amba, to Páli, which nestles under the slopes of the isolated hill fort of Sarasgarh, the top of which, though hardly covering ten thousand square yards, remains a small, but useless, British possession in the midst of this Native State. From

Páli another six miles by cart track, through fields and across an occasional spur, brings us to Nádsur, which lies cosily within a small grove of trees beneath the shadow of the Ghâts themselves. From Nádsur it is a stiff climb and a long walk to the caves, which are excavated in the side of a spur of the Ghâts two miles to the east of the village. On the other side of the spur ascends the Wágjai Ghât or pass, one of those numerous rough mountain defiles which connect the seaboard of the Konkan with the tableland of the Dakhan.

The caves are cut in a long line of trap cliff which faces nearly west, and are eighteen in number, the more important among them being the third, seventh, eighth, and fifteenth from the south end. The approach to them is in places very steep and precipitous, the path, near the caves, being but a narrow ledge of rock which slopes rapidly away to the ravines below.

A horizontal layer of soft red rock, embedded in the trap, and which varies in thickness from a few feet to a few inches, runs through the entire length of the caves, and, owing to the disintegration of this, the interiors of many of the caves have been greatly damaged. In some instances this layer of soft rock has completely rotted away, leaving the upper portions of the walls hanging from the ceilings without support. And it is, no doubt, owing to this cause that the façade of almost every cave has disappeared; for, when the soft rock crumbled away, leaving the overhanging caves without support, these fell in fragments as the elements loosened them, and so we now find heaps of fallen rock lying before the caves and on the slopes of the hill side. This seems to have happened in precisely the same manner to the Karsambla Caves, four and a half miles to the south of these.

**Cave No. 1.**

Taking the caves from the south end, No. 1 is a small rectangular cave measuring, roughly, 19 feet in length by 10 feet in breadth, having a bench along the back wall, and a small recess with a bench in the north end of the back wall. A portion of the thin outer screen wall remains

**Cave No. 2.**

Cave No. 2 is a somewhat similar cave to the last, but slightly larger, measuring 22 feet 4 inches from north to south by 13 feet in depth, from east to west, and 6 feet 6 inches high.

**Cave No. 3.**

In cave No. 3, which measures 32 feet 6 inches by 21 feet deep and 7 feet 6 inches high, there are six free standing rock-cut *dágobas*, varying in diameter from 6 feet 6 inches to 4 feet, as well as four smaller structural ones built of rough rubble—stone and mud—which have been more or less ruined. I opened the most complete one, which had lost its top, by cutting through the centre down to the rock surface, but found nothing save a handful of old rice husks, and about as much grey ash. These were not in the centre but nearer the side, and did not appear as if placed there with a purpose. The rock-cut *dágobas* have a striking resemblance to those at Bhájá, which are similarly clustered, partly within and partly without one of the excavations at those caves. There appears to have been no particular arrangement followed in excavating these, nor were they cut to any special size. The *dágobas* Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 5 (see plan) have the rail pattern round the tops of their drums, while Nos. 2 and 5 have it also on the necks of their Tees. To get the full height of No. 2 the ceiling has been raised at that part, over a rectangular area, about 10 inches higher. Over No. 5 the ceiling has been slightly scooped out, but not enough to allow of a Tee being fashioned above the dome: only the neck of it has been formed, and this joins and, as it were, supports the ceiling. The domes of these *dágobas* are rather more than semi-spheres and are thus drawn in at their bases: this is most so in the south-east one. Of the structural *dágobas* one has been thrown down almost entirely, another to within 18 inches of the floor, while the other has had its dome removed. A rough heap seems to mark the site of another.

In the back wall of the cave, behind the *dágobas*, is a niche, about three feet off the ground, surrounded by a chaitya arch, in which is a miniature free standing rock-cut *dágoba*, 1 foot 7 inches high, with a band of rail ornament around its drum. Its Tee has been broken off. Flanking the arch are small sections of rail ornament, while a whole band of it stretches across the bottom of the niche, and upon it stands the arch. Little brackets are thrown out supporting the sections of rail, just as we see them on the front of the chaitya cave at Kondáne. Above the arch is represented a succession of projecting eaves with two small chaitya windows. Four pilasters stand out in relief from the wall, between the floor of the cave and the band of rail, and are supposed to support the latter. The whole design might be taken to represent the front of a chaitya cave, and the *dágoba* as seen through the arch. The interior ribs,

which at Karli are of wood, are also represented. The whole front of this recess appears to have been painted at one time. In the adjacent end of the south wall is another arch and *dágoba*, but much more roughly cut than the other. There is no doubt these little *dágobas* were fashioned more as objects of worship than as ornament, and the large *dágobas* were cut and built as offerings rather than sepulchral monuments.

**Cave No. 4.**

Cave No. 4 is a small oblong cave 18 feet 9 inches by about 10 feet, having a bench recess in the north end of the back wall, and a cell in the north wall.

**Cave No. 5.**

Cave No. 5 consists of a group of cells on a slightly higher level than the rest. One has been recently occupied, and has its front closed up with a rubble wall. The cell on the south side has a square open window above the bench. Beside this bench is a dry water cistern.

**Cave No. 6.**

Cave No. 6 is a long oblong irregular cave with a low bench around the three sides, and a large cell off the south end of the back wall. It measures 37 feet by 14 feet 9 inches, and is 7 feet 4 inches high.

**Cave No. 7.**

No. 7 is the most important cave in the whole group, and it is also the largest, measuring 48 feet 9 inches by 39 feet, and 11 feet high. Like the others the front of this has entirely disappeared and nothing is left on which to form an idea of what it was like. Although the cave is a comparatively large one, yet its roof is unsupported by pillars of any kind, and the entire absence of pillars throughout the group is a fact which points to the caves being among the earliest of their class. Around the three sides of this cave are cells with a bench in each, and each is provided with a small lattice window. In the south wall are three cells, in the west or back wall four, and in the north wall one. Around the three sides of the caves, and before the cell doorways, runs a low bench, 2 feet 6 inches broad by about the same in height, round the south and west walls, but 9 feet 6 inches broad along the north side. The broad platform thus formed seems, if we may judge by the line of holes in the roof above it, to have been screened off from the rest of the cave. The ceiling, too, above this broad platform is lower than elsewhere. Small flights of steps lead up from the floor to the bench and platform.

The whole of the back wall, with parts of the north and south walls, are decorated with the Buddhist rail, arch, and other mouldings, with figures of men, women, and animals. Shallow niches alternate with the cell doors along the walls, and eachof the former is surmounted by the chaitya arch, with an imitation of wooden ribbing under its soffit, similar in design to the wooden front of the large cave at Karli. Two struts, rising in low relief from the walls, are represented as supporting the lower edge of the niche. The whole design, with the niche, is evidently a representation of the front of a chaitya cave. Flanking each arch and joining its haunches with the cell door on the one side and the lattice window on the other, are short lengths of rail moulding, that on the south wall being in wavy lines, while the rest is of the plain straight-lined kind. Vertical struts stand upon these lengths of rail, and support an cave of horizontal plain projecting bands or a row of triangular stepped-out facets. While the arch, niche, and supports represent the façade of a chaitya temple, the horizontal rail moulding, little pilasters, and eaves are in imitation of the front of a structural *vihára*.

These horizontal plain projecting bands may be seen as forming the overhanging eave of the *vihára* cave beside the chaitya at Kondáne.*

As the doorways to the cells were all fitted with wooden doors—the slots for fixing them indicating this—it became necessary to provide some means of ventilation, and this was gained by introducing little windows filled with various designs in perforated stone lattice-work. There is the simple square grating where the bars are set at right angles, leaving little square openings; three windows have the cross bars interlaced at an acute angle, which is rather an imitation of thin lathes than bars; one has cross bars spaced widely apart at right angles, and each of the square openings filled with two short bars crossing each other diagonally like a St. Andrew's cross; and one window is filled with a miniature Buddhist rail, the interstices forming the lights.

Above the cell doorways are various devices and figures. Two have each a row of three little chaitya arches, with bits of rail moulding between them, and one of these has, at one end, three little figures added of deer or some such animals, while in the arch above these is a pair of figures—a man and woman. Above other two doorways are two little chaitya arches with a *dágoba* and two worshippers in

* See frontispiece, Vol. IV, Reports of the Arch. Survey of W. India.

the middle between them. Another door has Gaja-Lakshmi above it. Lakshmi stands in the middle, with long petticoats, on a lotus, holding a long-stemmed flower in each hand, while the elephants, which are emptying water-pots over her, each stands upon a lotus. Beside the group, above the cell window, is the representation of the front of a house, within the verandah of which are two pairs of figures with cups and flowers in their hands. Another cell, which is fortunate in having two lattice windows, one on either side, has, round about the top of its doorway, a large chaitya arch, in the tympanum of which is another smaller representation of Gaja-Lakshmi. But the most curious of all is the figure over the doorway of the cell in the west corner of the south wall which is a huge five-hooded serpent whose voluminous folds extend, in several great rolls, over both the doorway and window. These different devices, coupled with the fact that each cell has a prepared panel for an inscription, point to the probability that each cell was the work of a separate monk. One of these panels—on the face of the cell in the north wall—bears a short inscription which seems to tell us the cell was excavated by Kritti-Kâdattâ, son of Gaṇaka. It is, as far as can be deciphered, as follows :—

*Prâkrit Text.*

गनकपुतेन कत-
[क]दतेन सव * * *

Ganaka-putena Kata—
[Ka]datena sava . . .

*Sanskrit Translation.*

गणक पुत्रेण कृत्ति-
कादत्तेन सर्व * * *

Gaṇaka-putreṇa Kritti—
Kâdattena sarva . . .

*English Translation.*

By Gaṇaka's son Krittikâdatta, all* . . . . . .

In the centre of the ceiling is a large rosette, about 3 feet 10 inches in diameter, composed of one large central lotus with four smaller ones set equidistant round it on a wreath of leaves, the space between the large lotus and the wreath being filled with lotus buds disposed in various positions. In addition to the figures over the doorways are a few others in the tympanums of the niche arches comprising a five-hooded serpent, two bulls which are apparently fighting an elephant,

* Translated by E. Hultzsch, Esq., Ph.D. See facsimile, plate VI.

and a lion. An interesting fact is that there is not a single image of Buddha, nor is one to be found in any of the other caves.

In the walls of the cells, opposite one another, are two small holes, about 5 feet 6 inches off the ground, which were apparently used to secure the ends of a rod or pole upon which to hang clothes or other articles, and these are at right angles to the stone benches, and crossed each cell above the foot of the bench.

The whole cave, with the cells, have been plastered and painted, very little of which now remains; but it is sufficient to show that both plaster and painting, in composition and vividness of colour, was much after the style of that at the Ajanta caves.

**Cave No. 8**

Cave No. 8 is a rudely cut chaitya cave, containing a large free standing *dágoba*, and measuring 24 feet in length by 15 feet 9 inches in width, and 15 feet high. The roof is vaulted and has an apsidal end. The *dágoba*, which is 9 feet 6 inches in diameter, is roughly cut and has a low drum. It has no Tee, but there is a hole in the top of the dome, 7½ inches square and the same in depth, in which a wooden Tee or umbrella was probably set. The lower portion of the partition wall between this cave and the last, which was very thin and was cut through the soft rock, has fallen away, leaving the upper part hanging from the roof. High up on the south side of the cave, inside, is a short inscription in large straggling letters, which is as follows :—

*Prâkrit Text.*

मितस सघरखितस * * * * *
* [दि]न भातुनो थ्रप[सखस]स * * * * *
Mitasa Sagharakhitasa .....
[di]na—bhâtuno Thûpa[sakhasa]sa .....

*Sanskrit Translation*

मित्रस्य सघरक्षितस्य * * * * *
* * * भ्रातुः स्तूपसखस्य * * * * *
Mitrasya Saṁgharakshitasya .....
. . . bhrâtuh Stupasakhasya .....

*English Translation*

[The gift] of Mitra, of Saṁgharakshita, .....
of Stupasakha, the brother of . . .

*Note*. Probably *mitra* is only the second part of a compound, the first half of which is lost.*

* Translated by E. Hultzsch, Esq., Ph D. See plate VI

**Cave No. 9.**

Cave No. 9 is composed of a small group of cells, the forward cave to which they were attached having fallen away. It was two-storeyed, and a row of sockets for beam ends, which may be seen in the wall between the upper and lower cells, shews that the flooring of the upper portion must have been of wood.

**Cave No. 10.**

Cave No. 10 is an oblong irregular cave with two cells off the back wall and a sunk bench between them, and there is also a sunk bench in the south wall. There has been an arched recess in the north wall, but this has been partly broken away, and on the plaster on the walls of this apartment are traces of a painted pattern, red, green, and white being conspicuous colours. At this end the cave floor has been broken through into a dry water cistern below.

**Cave No. 11.**

Cave No. 11 is a small and very much damaged excavation, made up of three or four cells leading off each other.

**Cave No. 12.**

Cave No. 12 is a broken oblong cave with two cells off the back wall, and a bench in each of the end walls. The cell doorways seem to have been fitted with wooden frames.

**Cave No. 13.**

Cave No. 13 is a group of cells. The two principal ones have a long room in front of them, screened in front with a thin partition wall, in the south end of which is a doorway, and in front a long open window. Each cell has a plain open window.

**Cave No. 14.**

Cave No. 14 is very much of the same plan as the last, having the same partition wall in front, in which is a long window, but there is only one cell off this room. The cave is on a higher level than the rest, and a flight of steps lead up to it at the south end. A low parapet wall guards the front verandah. This cave is in very fair preservation.

**Cave No 15.**

Cave No. 15 is a very neat little square cave on nearly the same level as the last. The back wall, off which are two cells, is decorated much in the same manner as that of cave 7. Slender pilasters, in low relief against the wall, are represented as supporting a superstructure, above which is a line of little chaitya windows with the stepped out triangular ornament and Buddhist rail between them. Around the top of each

doorway is a large arch, and in the tympanum of one, above the doorway, is Gaja-Lakshmi and her elephants, while the other has no sculpture. On either side of the south shrine doorway is a blind lattice window, that is, the perforations between the lattice have not been drilled right through; and on either side of the other doorway are blank squared sunk panels through which it was intended to form the windows.

The front of the cave was closed by a thin wall of rock, through which was cut a doorway and two long windows, one on either side of the former; but as it appears that these had frames and shutters of wood, it was not necessary to insert them in the inner cell doorways, which have no sockets for them.

In the north end wall of the verandah was a doorway with a chaitya arch about it, with a representation of Lakshmi and her elephants above it, while beside it is a small trellis window. This doorway led into a small cell, nearly all of which has fallen. Sculptured in bas-relief on the return of the wall, near this last doorway, are two figures—male and female—standing upon a huge fish. The male figure measures about 1 foot 7 inches and the female 1 foot 4½ inches in height. They are represented as costumed much in the same manner of dress as the figures on the façade at Karli. The man holds in his right hand a drinking cup or bowl, while his left hand seems intended to embrace the waist of the woman. She holds in her right hand a water-pot with a spout to it. Her hair is done up in a row of rope-like curls which surround her face to her ears, and it is knotted on her left side. In each of her earlobes hangs a cylindrical ornament, and round her neck is a necklet of beads from which are suspended a number of little plates. She is either nude to the waist or wears a skin-tight bodice. On her wrists and legs are rings, and round her waist, hanging somewhat loosely over a cloth which is tied round her loins, is a band of triple chain-work. The animal, upon which these two figures stand, is a genuine fish, and not the conventional *makara* so often portrayed. The mouth, which shows a row of teeth, top and bottom, is slightly open, and the tail is curled over on to the back. Behind the gill is a fin, and two others are shown beneath its belly.

**Cave No. 16.** Cave No. 16 is an unfinished cave on a much lower level than the last.

**Cave No. 17.** Cave No. 17 is a small cave, with a thin partition wall in front, pierced with a long window. There are benches within, but no separate cells. Next to this is a dry water-cistern.

**Cave No. 18.** Cave No. 18 is another cave exactly like the last in size and plan.

In the cliff, some distance away to the south of these, are a few more unfinished caves which, from the falling of the rock, are in a ruinous state.

These caves, among which Nos. 3, 7 and 15 afford us most data upon which to fix their age, are among the oldest of their class. The decoration on the walls of Nos. 7 and 15 approaches more nearly to that of Cave XII at Ajanta which Dr. Burgess places about 100 B.C.*, and they have also a striking resemblance to the Kondáne, Bhájá and Bedsa *viháras* dated by him and the late Dr. Fergusson about 200 B.C. Like Cave XI at Ajanta they have no pillars, and a curious coincidence is that the front of that particular cave has also disappeared. It is possible that there was little façade, or what existed was in wood-work; and, indeed, a good deal of wood-work, as screens and even flooring of a second storey, was used throughout the Nádsur Caves. From the general style, then, coupled with the character of the letters in the inscriptions, the absence of all images of Buddha, the presence of the *dágoba* as an object of worship, the want of pillars, the use of wood-work, the rail and other very early ornament, I think we cannot be far wrong in ascribing to these caves as early a date as Bhájá or Kondáne, *i.e.*, about B.C. 200.

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*Cave Temples of India, page 291, plate XXVII

## THE KARSAMBLA CAVES.

The caves at Karsambla consist of one large *vihára* 67 feet 9 inches wide by about 52 feet in depth, with a number of smaller subsidiary excavations in ruins upon either side of it. They are situated in a spur running out from the main chain of the Gháts in a south-westerly direction, south of the hill fort of Borapgadh, hardly two miles east of the village of Karsambla, and about six* miles south of the Nádsur Caves. Seventeen cells surround the three sides of the principal cave; and the *dágoba* shrine, which is very slightly larger than No. 8 at Nádsur, is here included in the larger *vihára*, and forms part of it, it being excavated still further in off the back wall. Like the Nádsur Caves the whole of the fronts of these caves have fallen away.

Around the three sides of the large cave are seventeen cells, each provided with its bench, and all having once held wooden door-frames and doors. The windows of the cells, which are high off the ground, are here all quite open, and are not filled with grating or cross bars as those at Nádsur are.

The *dágoba* shrine, which at Nádsur is excavated beside the main *vihára*, is here part of it, a portion of the back wall at the east end being driven further in to form the vaulted compartment, 15 feet 6 inches high, in the middle of which stands a *dágoba* 11 feet in diameter and 10 feet 10 inches high. In the top of the *dágoba*, which has no Tee, are five holes, one central square one, and four circular ones forming a square around it. In each of the cells in the back wall is a little cupboard niche. As in the Nádsur Cave 7, the main cave here has the bench round it, broader on one side where, from slots in the ceiling, it would appear to have been screened off in the same manner. The caves appear to have been plastered.

There is a total absence of all sculpture and ornament, and no inscriptions could be found, but the great likeness of this cave and its subsidiary ones to those at Nádsur leaves no possible doubt as to their having been excavated by the same people at the same time. Like those at Nádsur, too, the water cisterns are dry, and the same layer of soft red rock runs through them. The minor caves on either side of the large *vihára* are insignificant and in ruin. Among them may be noticed a few small roughly cut shrines containing rock *dágobas*.

* Four and a half miles S.S E. in a straight line.

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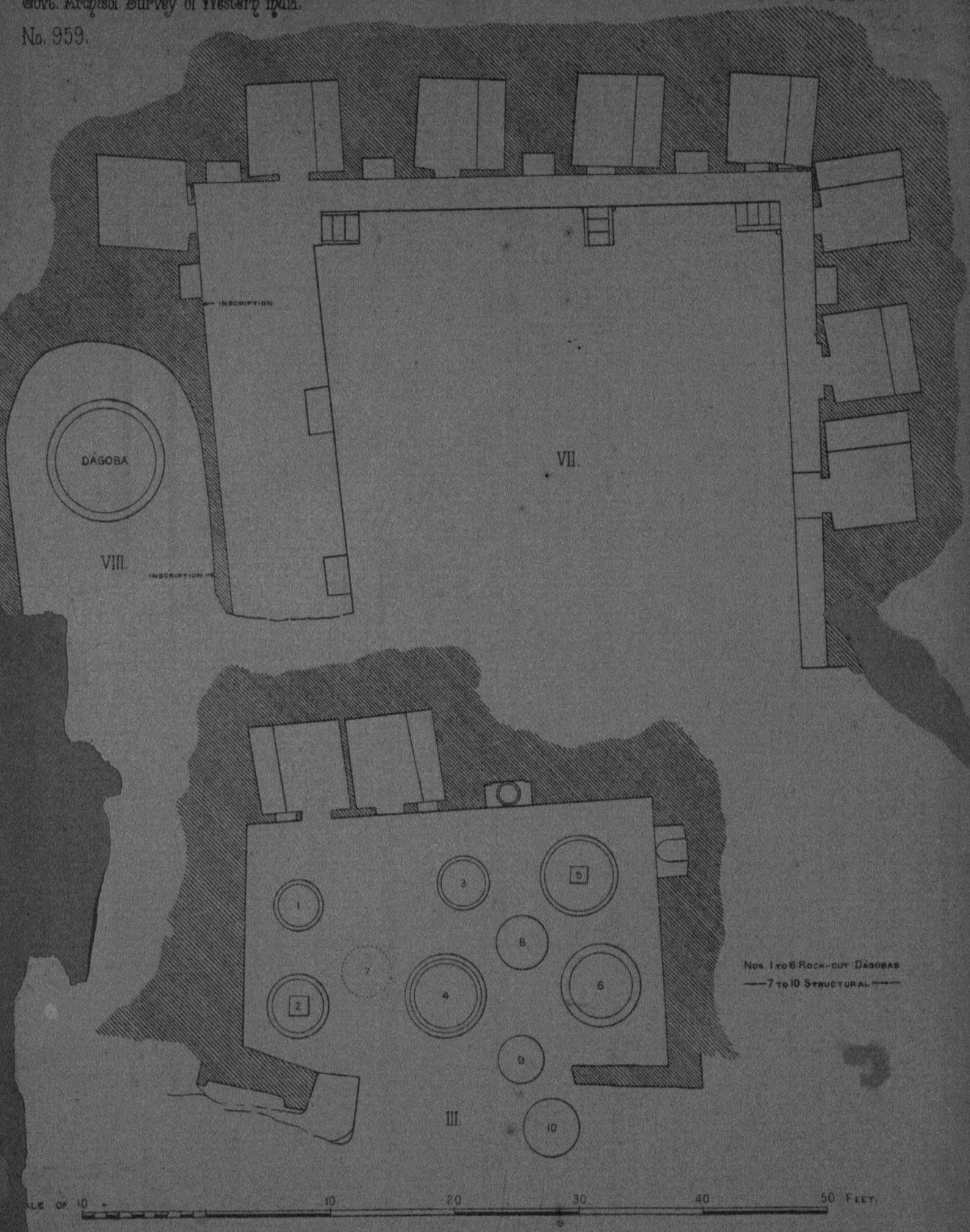
No. 958.

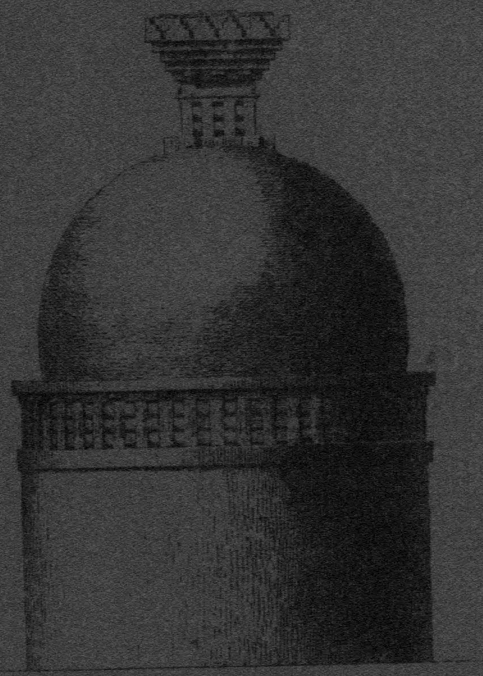
General Plan.

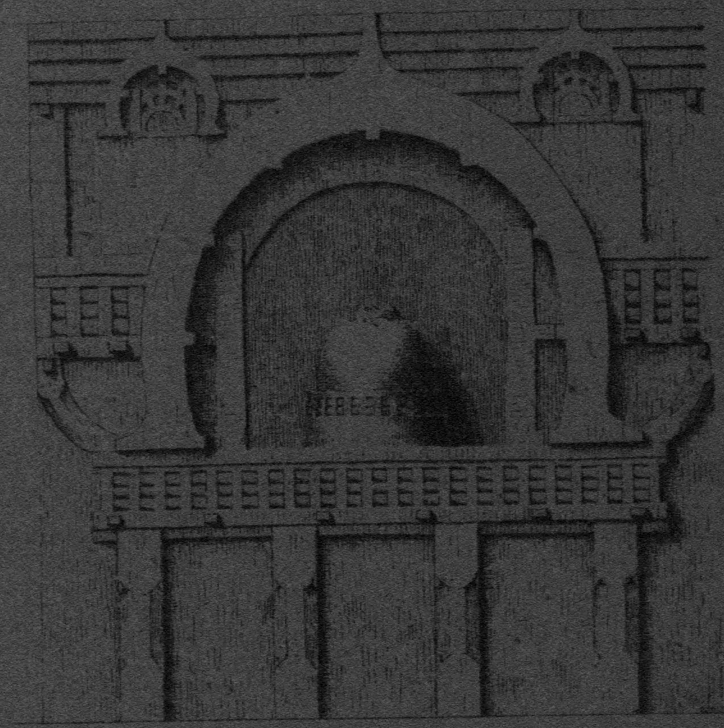


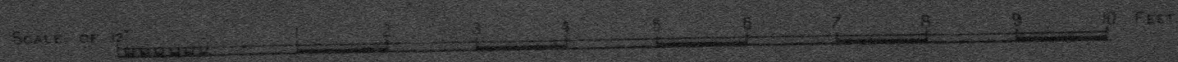

NADSUR CAVES.

Plans of Caves III, VII, and VIII.

Office Poona 1890.

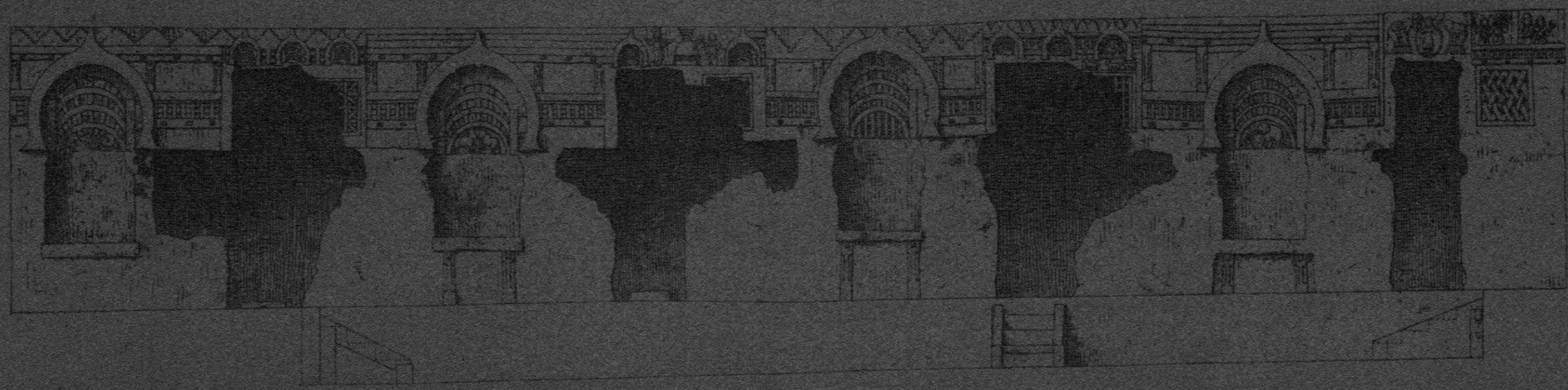


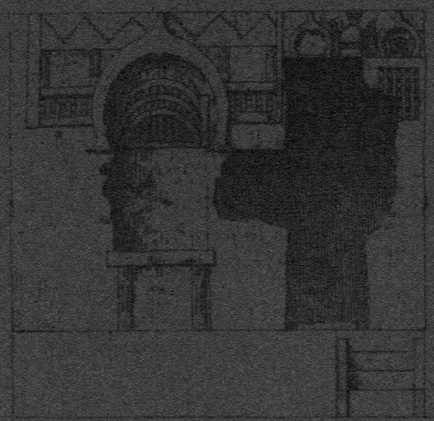


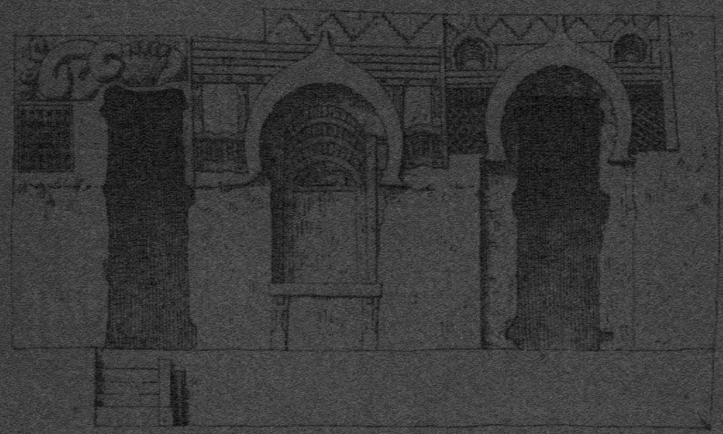



NADSUR CAVES

Free standing dagoba and wall niche in Cave III.





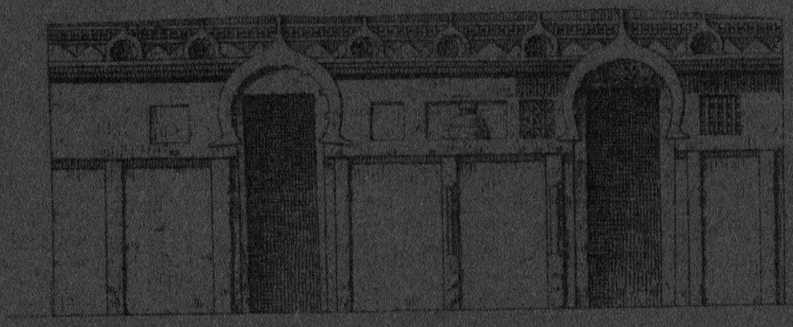


SCALE OF 5 — 0 — 5 — 10 — 15 — 20 FEET.

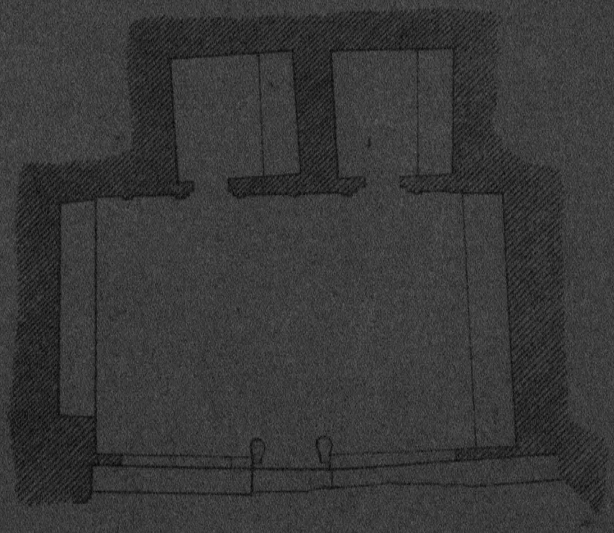
SCALE OF 1/4 — 1/2 — 1 — 2 FEET.

NADSUR CAVES

Elevation of back and side walls and ceiling ornament in Cave VII.



Scale of 5 5 10 15 Feet.



Scale of 10 10 Feet

Scale of 1 1 Foot

NADSUR CAVES

Plan, elevation of back wall and sculpture from Cave XV.

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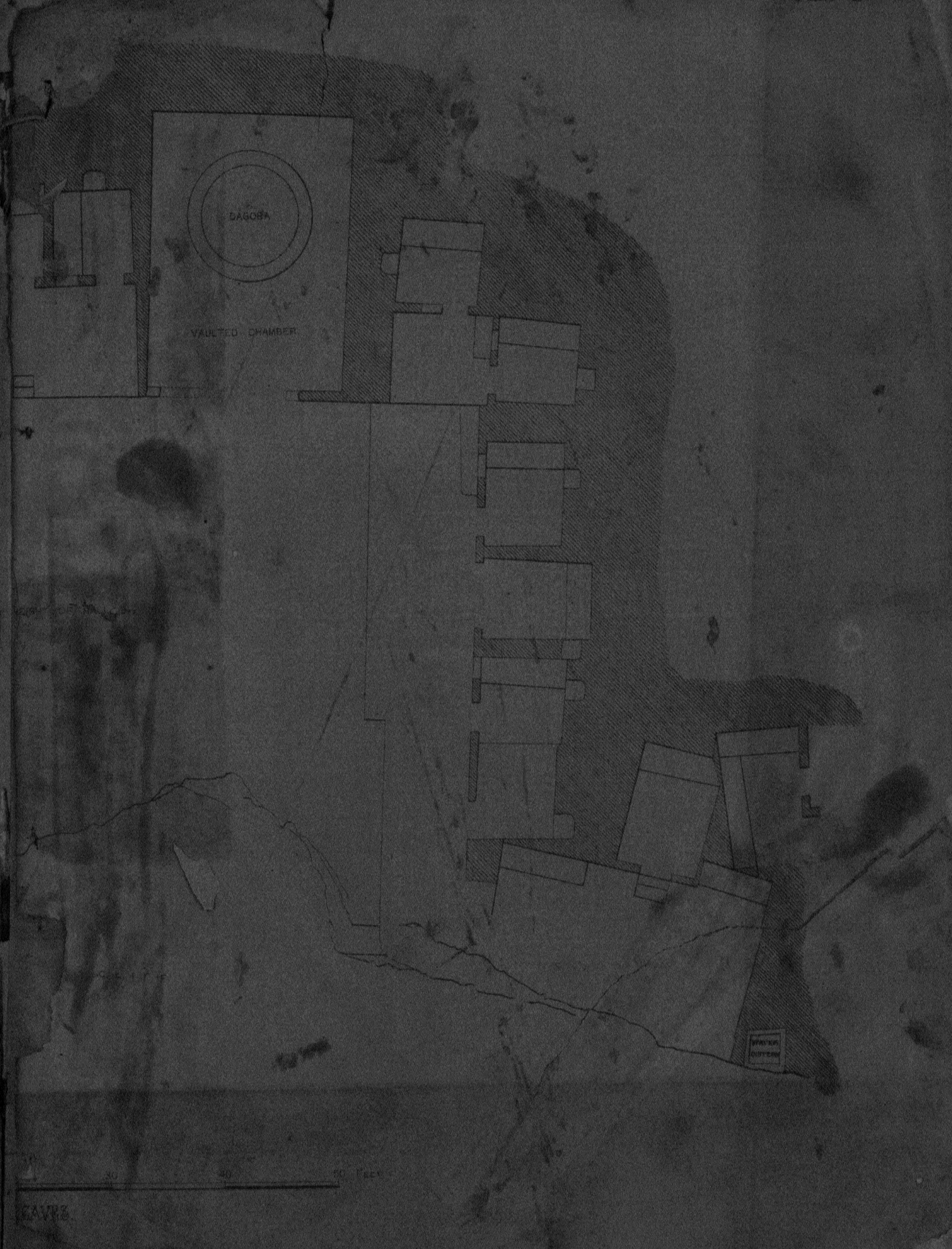
Plan of




CAVE 2

NADSUR CAVES

Inscriptions from Caves VII and VIII.